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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 003246

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SUBJECT: (S) CODEL KOLBE: SHARON DISSATISFIED WITH U.S.

SUPPORT FOR ABU MAZEN

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (S) During a 75-minute meeting May 30 with Codel Kolbe, attended also by the Ambassador, Prime Minister Sharon described several reasons why he is not happy with current developments. In familiar terms, Sharon said that his and Israel's willingness to move forward in the peace process after Gaza disengagement will be dependent on whether Palestinians take steps against terrorism. So far, the Palestinian track record is poor, Sharon said. He noted that a rocket had landed at the entrance of the packing house in his own farm the previous evening, and that Israel had prevented at least two other attempted rocket launches from Gaza. Sharon said Abu Mazen had made a "major mistake" in signing an agreement with the terrorists.

2. (S) Sharon insisted that he will implement disengagement despite the hard internal situation in Israel. He also said that he is making efforts to fulfill Israeli commitments from the Sharm el-Sheikh summit, citing the release of prisoners. However, he said, he has not seen similar steps by Palestinians to fulfill their commitments. Sharon continued that, for Israel to enter the roadmap after disengagement, there needs to be Palestinian reforms, dismantlement of terrorist organizations and a beginning of "education for peace." The major problem, Sharon said, is that the Arab world does not recognize the birthright of the Jews to establish an independent state in the birthplace of the Jewish people. Even Arab states which have treaties with Israel do not encourage peace between their people and Israelis. Sharon said that Israel enjoys a kind of "strategic cooperation" with Jordan, but this is between Israeli and Jordanian leaders. In Egypt, Israel faces a boycott by academics and the unions. In both Egypt and in Jordan, incitement in schools and mosques continues. Sharon said this proves that Israel needs to be careful in the peace process. In the Middle East, declarations and even peace agreements are usually meaningless; the commitment of other parties can be judged only by their actions.

3. (S) Sharon said that he remains ready to make painful compromises for a genuine and durable peace but he will make no compromises regarding security, now or in the future. "I stand with my back to the wall." Sharon said that continued terrorism has an impact on the Israeli people. The short period of quiet since January has been disrupted by the resumption of Palestinian Qassam and rocket attacks. This has caused the Israeli people to distrust Sharon, as evidenced by reduced support for his policies in the polls. Sharon said that his internal situation is exacerbated by every act of terror. The polls show a drop in support from 70 to 54 percent.

4. (S) Equally important, Sharon said, his position has not been helped by the results of Abu Mazen's visit to Washington and the perception created that the President's April 14, 2004 letter to Sharon is no longer valid. Sharon cautioned that the U.S. needs to be more careful regarding announcements and promises it makes to Abu Mazen. People in Israel now doubt Sharon when he refers to U.S. support for Israel's holding on to the major settlement blocs as noted in the Bush letter. "Every time someone says something, it has an impact and increases doubts about the President's letter." Sharon asked for a period of quiet so that he can conclude the disengagement.

5. (S) Sharon noted that he is not "jealous" of Abu Mazen and said he recognized it is not easy to be a Palestinian. In this respect, he knows it was important for Abu Mazen to visit Washington. However, U.S. statements not only have increased doubts within Israel about Sharon's policies, but they have also resulted in an impression among Palestinians that the U.S. will not exert pressure on them to take steps against terrorism. Sharon reiterated that a clear message must be sent to the Arabs that Israel will not move in the roadmap unless terrorism stops. "It is wrong to think that I will move straight to the roadmap after disengagement unless the Palestinians take steps against terrorism. The roadmap does not work according to a timetable and there is no bypass. Rather, it provides for a solution in stages which need to be fully implemented in order to move to the next stage." Sharon said Israel is a "tiny, small country" and the only democracy between the Atlantic Ocean and India. Israel will not take risks unless there is a full cessation

of terrorism.

16. (S) Sharon also offered two additional pieces of advice to the U.S. First, he said, that nothing will happen if external assistance to Palestinians is provided without reforms. We have seen in the past that money provided to the Palestinians has been wasted. Second, Sharon cautioned that the Europeans may consider removing Hamas from the terrorism list once Hamas contests the upcoming elections. He said he realizes the U.S. understands the dangers posed by Hamas, but he is not sure Europe has the same understanding.

17. (S) Asked about Iran, Sharon said that Israel is cooperating closely with the U.S. and others but does not want to be the "spearhead" of efforts to stop the Iranian nuclear weapons program. The key, in his view, is when Iran will reach a point of no return after which they will be able to build nuclear weapons. Right now, international monitoring of the Iranian nuclear program makes it harder for them to work on the weapons program; the Iranians also have technical problems they have not yet solved. Sharon said the Iranians are very concerned that the nuclear issue will be referred to the U.N. Security Council, and Sharon advocated that that is exactly what should be done. If Iran is under pressure, he said, it will increase the possibility of internal change and the possibility of curbing the nuclear weapons program. Sharon said it is vitally important that the Europeans maintain responsibility for dealing with this problem and that the Europeans should not believe that Israel will take care of it.

18. (S) The following Codel members attended: Reps. Jim Kolbe, Nita Lowey, David Price, Roger Wicker, Marion Berry, Susan Davis, Gary Ackerman and Jeff Miller. The Codel did not clear this cable before departure.

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